

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
AMEMBASSY JIDDA

C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 348

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: CARR, SA
SUBJECT: HARDENING SAUDI ATTITUDE TOWARD ARREST CASES

REF JIDDA 2923

1. RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH MINISTER OF INTERIOR AND HIS SPECIAL ASSISTANT INDICATE THAT THE SAUDIS ARE BECOMING LESS INCLINED TO TREAT AMERICANS ANY DIFFERENTLY THAN SAUDIS WHEN THEY VIOLATE SAUDI LAW. THEY ARE ALSO BECOMING MORE IMPERVIOUS TO WHAT HAS BEEN OUR MOST EFFECTIVE ARGUMENT FOR MAKING SPECIAL ALLOWANCES FOR WESTERNERS--THE NEED TO AVOID CRITICISM IN THE WESTERNERS PRESS. THE NEW FEELING IS THAT ISLAMIC LAW IS THE HERITAGE OF SAUDI ARABIA AND THE GOVERNMENT NEED NOT APOLOGIZE FOR ENFORCING IT WITHIN ITS BORDERS. THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SOME ASPECTS OF SAUDI LAW MAY SEEM CRUEL TO WESTERNERS BUT SAY THAT IT IS APPLIED FAIRLY AND UNIFORMLY. IF MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY ARE NOT EXEMPT THEY ASK, WHY SHOULD FOREIGNERS BE ENTITLED TO ANYTHING BETTER. THEY NOTE THAT SAUDIS IN THE U.S. DO NOT GET SUCH HIGH LEVEL CONSIDERATION WHEN THEY HAVE LEGAL DIFFICULTY AND ADD THAT OUT OF ALL THE EMBASSIES IN THE COUNTRY, ONLY THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IS SO INSISTENT ON EXCEPTIONS FOR ITS CITIZENS.

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2. AS TOP MINISTRY OFFICIALS BECOME MORE SET IN THEIR BELIEF THAT SAUDI LAW SHOULD NOT MAKE SPECIAL ALLOWANCES FOR FOREIGNERS, THEY ARE ALSO INCREASINGLY UNWILLING TO NUDGE LOCAL OFFICIALS INTO ACTION WHEN CASES STALL. THE REASON FOR THIS IS THAT SAUDI OFFICIALS TYPICALLY DO NOT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN EMBASSY EFFORTS TO INSURE FAIR PROCEDURE AND ATTEMPTS TO INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE CASE. BOTH INSTANCES ARE CONSIDERED BY THEM TO BE REQUESTS FOR SPECIAL EX-

EMPTIONS.

3. WHILE THE MINISTER AND HIS DEPUTIES REMAIN READY TO INTERVENE IN CASES OF MAJOR HUMANITARIAN OR POLITICAL CONCERN, THEY CLEARLY WANT THE EMBASSY TO BE MORE SELECTIVE ABOUT THE CASES IT BRINGS UP. THEY HAVE EXPRESSED IRRITATION ABOUT HAVING TO REVIEW CASES THEY CONSIDER PETTY AND HAVE STATED THAT MOST MATTERS SHOULD BE RESOLVED ON THE LOCAL LEVEL. WHILE THE NEW MOOD AT THE TOP IS NOT LIKELY TO HAVE IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON AMERICANS IN THE KINGDOM, IT WILL TEND TO MAKE DEALINGS WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS MORE FRUSTRATING ONCE THESE OFFICIALS REALIZE THAT THEY ARE NOT LIKELY TO GET HIGH LEVEL PRODDING TO BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO CONSULAR REQUESTS.
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